

Study Guide
Series: Lessons From the Wilderness
“Enslaved and Imprisoned”

Monday - Genesis 30:22-24, 33:1-7, 37:1-11

From his birth, Joseph occupied a special place in his family. He was the family’s eleventh child, but the first one born to Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife. When Jacob felt afraid that his brother Esau might do something violent when they met, he put all his other children out front, and placed the favored Joseph and his mother safely at the rear. Later, he gave him a highly distinctive garment—perhaps the most famous coat in history. Based on your growing up years, is it easier for you to identify with the young Joseph, enjoying his privileged status, or with his brothers, feeling undervalued and ignored? How has trusting in God, as a reliable source of what the Bible calls “steadfast love”, helped you to grow beyond the wounds that the dynamics of family life can leave on all of us? Being the “chosen child” made 17-year-old Joseph foolishly, destructively arrogant. Have you ever feared that honestly acknowledging your abilities will make you like young Joseph? In what ways have you learned to recognize and offer your talents and gifts, without using them as a tool to make you feel superior to others?

Tuesday - Genesis 37:18-28, 39:1-6

Joseph’s jealous brothers sold him to traders going through the wilderness to Egypt. He became a slave to Potiphar and his reliability and hard work won him Potiphar’s complete trust. Joseph’s dramatic story is one of betrayal and providence, of God accomplishing his purposes despite the worst that our broken world can do. Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes. You have had an easy life. There is stress between you and your brothers, but you can still trust your brothers, right? Wrong. Those closest to him betrayed Joseph terribly. Have you ever felt the pain of betrayal? Did that experience tend to weaken or strengthen your faith at the time? In what ways have you grown stronger because of surviving that painful time? It would be natural to assume that when Joseph became a slave in Egypt all hope was lost. But as we read of his rise to trust and influence in Potiphar’s household, we begin to see God’s power at work. The apostle Paul exclaimed: “God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge are so deep! They are as mysterious as his judgments, and they are as hard to track as his paths!” (Romans 11:33) How have you sensed God working in mysterious ways? When has God carried you through a painful or challenging time?

Wednesday - Genesis 39:7-22

Potiphar’s wife wanted Joseph to have an affair with her. The text tells us nothing else about her, but it must have been clear to Joseph that this woman could cause him problems. Joseph, knowing how much Potiphar trusted him, might have gotten away with the affair and kept his position at the head of the household. But he refused to betray Potiphar’s trust, and it cost him—outwardly, at least. How do you handle it when someone else’s wrongdoing hurts you unfairly? Have you ever chosen not to do something wrong, even though you could “get away with it”? As you look back, are you glad you preserved your integrity or not? For what reasons? It wasn’t long before the jail’s commander related to Joseph the same way Potiphar had: “The jail’s commander put all of the prisoners in the jail under Joseph’s supervision” (verse 22). What inner choices do you believe Joseph had to make in order to remain worthy of trust and responsibility even in the face of injustice and disappointment?

Thursday - Genesis 41:14-44

Genesis 40 told of Joseph interpreting dreams in prison for two servants of Pharaoh and asking for help in winning release. The wine steward forgot about Joseph, adding two years to Joseph's time in custody. But, the unjust detention finally ended when the steward recalled that Joseph could interpret troubling dreams. When the Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I heard that when you hear a dream, you can interpret it," Joseph's answer was quick and clear: "It's not me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable response" (verse 16). Despite his eagerness to get out of prison, Joseph wouldn't take the credit Pharaoh offered him when it belonged to God. He'd formed a strong character through his day-by-day choices. What choices are you making each day to build the character and integrity God wants you to have? When Pharaoh "put [his signet ring] on Joseph's hand, dressed him in linen clothes, and put a gold necklace around his neck," he replaced Joseph's prison garb! The apostle Peter wrote, "God's strong hand is on you; he'll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you" (1 Peter 5:6-7, *The Message*). What helps you to trust that God is "careful" with your life? When things aren't going as you would wish, how can you be as patient as Joseph was?

Friday - Genesis 45:1-15, 50:15-21

An even greater character test awaited Joseph. With no idea that he was the brother they'd sold, Jacob's sons sought to buy food from Egypt. Joseph first put them through some challenging situations (cf. Genesis 42-44), probably to test whether they had grown morally in the years since they sold him. He let go of any ideas of revenge he might have had and reunited his family with generosity and grace. Joseph told his brothers, "Don't be angry with yourselves that you sold me here. Actually, God sent me before you to save lives." (Genesis 45:5). Recall a time when someone harmed you. How are you letting God redeem that evil, and bend it for good purposes? Do you trust God to be as creative and redemptive in your life as he was in Joseph's? When his brothers came before him, what could Joseph have done to them? How would you have acted in his place? How do you imagine Joseph's forgiving generosity affected his brothers? In what ways did Joseph give us a vivid image of the way God treats us when we need God's grace?